The June meeting of the E-Regulation Community of Practice was held on June 24, 2002, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Department of Transportation. The goal of this meeting was to develop a "tangible product" for presentation to the CIO Council's Knowledge Management Working Group to demonstrate the viability of the CoP. The resulting product was a commitment from some CoP member organizations to participate in a pilot to advance the Federal government on-line electronic forms initiative - Fedforms.gov. Although the initial effort relates to static forms - forms that are presented in down-loadable/printable format - we also addressed future plans to provide access to interactive and/or transactional e-forms

The project manager for the government-wide FedForms.gov initiative is John Thomas, the program analyst in the GSA Regulatory Information Service Center. John led the meeting discussion on FedForms.

This document contains the following sections which represent the product of the meeting:

MEETING SUMMARY

PILOT WORKING GROUP NEXT STEPS

BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

MEETING AGENDA

BACKGROUND: FEDFORMS.GOV INITIATIVE

MEETING SUMMARY

25 people representing 12 agencies participated in the meeting. The key points surfaced during the FedForms pilot discussion were:

!   Agency participation in FedForms.gov contributes to agency goals for GPEA compliance.

!   The universe of forms is limited to "static" forms (downloaded, printed, returned via mail) OMB approved forms. Agencies need to decide which of those forms should be made publicly available.

!   The question that the pilot is intended to resolve is: How will agencies make their OMB approved forms available on the web in a way that they can located and identified by the search engine used by FedForms (the Firstgov.gov search engine)?

!   The search engine will rely on metadata tags within the forms themselves to identify and classify the forms. One of the main contributions of the CoP working group to this initiative will be help in determining the easiest way to implement the metadata.

!   GSA needs to find out what e-form file formats the FirstGov search engine can crawl and what format the metadata needs to be in. This information will come from the FirstGov search engine provider.

!   Pilot schedule - pilot forms need to be ready for searching by the end of July 2002. GSA needs to begin discussions with the working group within the next two weeks (by the middle of July). The full schedule and agency resource commitment requirements should be known by then also.

!   7 member agencies committed to work with GSA to determine the full requirements of the project. 4 member agencies said they could not commit at this time but would discuss it with others within their agencies to see if a commitment could be subsequently made. Once the final resource requirements and schedule are known, members will determine if they can make a full commitment to the project. The commitments to participate in the requirements definition are as follows:

Agencies Committed		Commitments Pending	
NRC	FERC	DOI	PTO
ATFB	FDIC	PBGC	DOT
SEC	FMC		
DOJ/ATR			

PILOT WORKING GROUP NEXT STEPS

GSA will forward updates of their progress in implementing the search engine and elicit the group's feedback as they go along.

Once the full scope and resource requirements for the pilot are know, group members will determine if their respective agencies can commit to the full pilot.

Agencies participating in the pilot will include the metadata in a subset of their publicly available forms and make them avail to be searched by the FirstGov/FedForms search engine. The group will then help

! Make sure the search engine can reach the forms.

! Make sure that the metadata tagging scheme can be applied to "transactional" forms in the future and that the forms can be located by the search engine.

! Develop a more precise definition of online transactions using a form versus a transaction process used by registered users.

Within the next few weeks, GSA will provide the set of instructions they receive from the search engine vendor.

GSA will communicate with the working group as needed. These communications and any resultant commitments or information will be documented for sharing with the full CoP membership.

BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the primary functions of a CoP is for members who have "been there, done that" relay to others what did and didn't work along the way. The following best practices and things-to-avoid recommendations surfaced during the FedForms discussion:

! It's always a good idea to build on work that others have done. SSA should be part of the pilot working group since GSA has already done some FedForms work with them.

! Although the FedForms initiative is focused on static forms, the future use of other types of forms should be considered during initial development. Better to build it in at the beginning than to have to tear it down and patch it later on. The CoP identified 3 evolutionary phases for e-forms: 1) static: downloaded, printed, returned via regular mail; 2) fillable: filled-out via computer, returned via internet; 3) transactional: forms that generate electronic transactions that directly update back-end data bases. Almost all of the member agencies are looking toward fillable forms, at a minimum, and many are looking beyond to transactional forms.

! Along with the forms, agencies need to be provide instructions on how to fill out forms. A bad practice is to make the instructions too detailed and lengthy. "Mouse-over" pop-ups and online help facilitates usability. Need to keep them simple and brief, focusing on the most common features and giving links to more detailed, supplemental information if required.

! Experience has shown that it's necessary to address adjusting business processes to take full of advantage of automation. It would be of great value to the public if FedForms could link all the forms related to a particular activity together so the public could identify all the pieces of a transaction (especially across multiple government agencies) at one time - - truly one-stop shopping. For instance: when two public utilities want to merge, they have to file with FTC, DOJ, SEC, and FERC as well as with state commissions where they have power plants. Perhaps a reference to any one of the forms involved would bring up a list of its associated forms.

MEETING AGENDA

Opening Remarks/Mtg Logistics	Bill Bennett (FERC)
E-Reg Community Virtual Space	Bill Bennett
Topic Introduction	Moe Levin (NRC)
Project Background	John Thomas (GSA)
Pilot Round-Table Discussion	All
Discussion Summary	Moe Levin
Pilot Next Steps	All
Future - transactional forms	All
Meeting Summary & Conclusion	Bill Bennett

BACKGROUND: FEDFORMS.GOV INITIATIVE

Mandate:

Presidential memorandum of December 17, 1999, issued to the heads of executive departments and agencies, titled "Electronic Government." Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA), P. L.105-277, Title XVII, which was signed into law on October 21, 1998. Office of Management and Budget memorandum establishing the E-Government Task Force, July 18, 2001.

Description:

Federal forms are stored electronically by Federal agencies in many places and formats. There is no one place that provides access to all Federal forms. In many cases, a person needs to know what agency is responsible for a form to know where to find it on that agency's website. At the request of the Office of Management and Budget, GSA is building a website, FedForms.Gov, (http://www.fedforms.gov/). FedForms.Gov serves as a central and convenient source of Federal forms for citizens, businesses and Federal, State, and local government agencies. Currently, FedForms.Gov contains links to hundreds of Federal forms and agency websites.

FedForms.gov consists of an Access database and a list of links to Agency Forms Management web sites. The Access database contains information for each linked Federal form such as agency, sub-agency (if applicable), form number, form title, form URL, keywords (up to 10), and OMB Number. Agencies can submit updates to the Access database, via the FedForms.gov web site. These updates stay in a holding file until checked by RISC to confirm that they meet FedForms criteria. The site contains access to more than 900 forms from agencies throughout the government.

Citizens, businesses, and organizations can access forms in either of two ways:

 by searching the FedForms database to find the desired form, or,

 through the list of Agency Forms Management web sites that link to an agency's forms page. The agency page may include program descriptions and instructions for using the agency's forms.

An improved search capability is being pursued through a partnership with FirstGov.gov and by helping agencies prepare forms for many types of commercial search engines. In addition, there is no administrative connection between the forms on agency sites and OMB's Paperwork Reduction Act approval process. OIRA has asked RISC to develop a practical solution for this problem.

Customers:	General Public
Stakeholders:	Federal agencies, CIO Council, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), GSA/OGP/Electronic Government-ME, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA)
Strategic Goal:	Provide a central source for Federal forms (including OMB-approved forms)
Performance Indicators:	Number of page requests, Number of distinct hosts served, Number of agencies linked to site, Percent of OMB-approved Forms on site